

Mayor Charlie Luken

State of the City Address

January 10, 2002

****Please note—this is not an actual transcript of the speech. It is a set of notes that Mayor Luken referred to when delivering the speech.****

Good Afternoon... Rotarians, and guests. (history of State of City) Acknowledge... good council
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This afternoon I will be talking about ways our City can improve, and move forward. This is not a look BACK...it is not a half-empty look at our City.

Because, with all of the voices that have torn down our City in 2001, it is tempting to dwell on the negative...to be defensive.

Understand, please, my simple premise for the remarks that follow:

CINCINNATI IS A GREAT CITY. I plan to say that often this year....to counter those negative voices who, for too long, have had the attention of our media outlets ...media outlets who, too often, disseminate the most hateful and negative voices in our community.

We have done this now, every year, since 1985...but I know in my experience this talk has never been more timely, or important.

We are setting a new course for our City...and a new direction. In 2001, we were stunned by events on a local, and national level. Our City remains in the national spotlight, and not for any good reasons.

Our residents adopted a new system of government...new powers for the mayor, heightened expectations, and, above all, Cincinnatians demand results...no more excuses.

This afternoon, I am going to tell you what I am going to do...not what I expect to do, not what I hope to do. I will set out clear and objective measures of success, and --correspondingly-- when we get together next year---you and all of our citizens will know where we have produced, and where we have stumbled.

Let me set the stage.

We have two, very different approaches going on, right now, in Cincinnati.

The first... is the negative voices who seek to tear down everything.

Make an improvement, and it is not enough. Suggest a compromise, and it is all or nothing. Agree to a solution, and watch the backtracking and backstabbing begin.

Then we have the people who understand a simple premise: that it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. People who want to move our City forward...send this great city in a direction of real change that will lift us all to a better place.

I stand squarely with those good people...people who are not satisfied with the status quo, but are willing to get in the arena, dare to fail, but make every effort to succeed.

As Cincinnati embarks on a new year, with new hope and unlimited opportunity, here are my three areas of focus...with the results we will achieve.

Last year I told this audience about my deep concern over the state of race relations in our City. I rated it the number one issue. It still is.

As we look to bring our City together, I want to thank the thousands of Cincinnatians who have volunteered their time to make our City more just, and more united.

Never before has such energy been expended....the dialogue we have engaged in is a vital part of the solution.

Groups like...Cincinnati CAN, the Amos Project, JCRC, and, yes, even our friends in the media, have recognized their responsibility to get involved...and are teaching us all to approach one another as people...and not a stereotype.

Now, we must come together in dialogue...and in action. I asked the United States Justice Department to review the practices and procedures of the Cincinnati Police Department. I said, and say now, that I did not do that as an indictment of our Department, but I recognized the need for independent verification that our Police department was doing it right.

Some said it was not enough....many said I went too far. But I am glad the Justice Department came to Cincinnati, I am proud of the cooperation our Police Department gave to the review, and I think we are a better City for having gone through the evaluation.

But we are not done. By April first, the City of Cincinnati, and the Justice Department, should agree on a set of recommendations that will make our Department better. Our City will then set out, with the cooperation of our neighborhoods, to implement those reforms....

We will put our police in closer contact with residents, and insist that police come to know the people they serve as, just that, people...not just as complainants or suspects.

We will insist on simple politeness. Most of our Officers understand the importance of courtesy... but nothing derails our efforts at improving police-community relations like a disrespectful remark.

We will more carefully track the performance of each officer....for the officer's sake, and the sake of the community. We will assist officers who need relief from the rigors of life on the street.

We will let our citizens understand a new, and simple process to file a complaint, and each complaint will get a response.

WE acknowledge that police work is often a matter of a split second decision, and we will treat fairly, and with respect those who have suffered loss in incidents involving law enforcement.

We want it clearly understood that we have a good police department...and that we ask our officers to do the work of sociologist, psychologist, psychiatrist, and law enforcement officer all at the same time. We owe them our gratitude, and we will respect them.

George, Pope, Jeter, Crayon....these are the names of fallen heroes,,,Cincinnati Police Officers have lost their lives in the brave performance of their duties. I attended each funeral. In their memory...let me tell you what I will not do...I will not roll over to those who stereotype our police as murderers, or rapists, or criminals. ..and neither should any Cincinnati.

Our progress as a community will be measured and re-measured this year, by all sorts of people, coming at it from all sorts of angles.

But if you want a measure that will, long term, override all others in importance, it is the importance of good educations, followed by meaningful jobs. Other issues decrease in importance...if all of our citizens can share in the bounty of the great City of Cincinnati.

And so, we will form partnerships ...partnerships designed to lift people out of poverty...not maintain it...and provide real opportunity.

(1) Education , our number one partnership.

Cincinnati Public Schools are still celebrating the ratings that came out on Monday...Cincinnati Public is the only large urban school district that is not in a State Of Emergency.

The district operates on a simple principle that I have heard Dr. Steven Adamowski articulate several times: Yes, children from low-income homes often present themselves at school with special needs....But, NO, that does not mean they cannot learn.

But the job is far from over, and we are not even close to where we must be. Improving the school system is a key to the future of the City, and getting more families living in the City.

This year, under the leadership of Dr. Adamowski and the Board of Education, the system will undertake a nearly one billion dollar construction project to improve the physical facilities.

The City will support, with money and energy, this ambitious plan.

I dare say, the self esteem of any child is effected by their surroundings, and some of the buildings I have been in are substandard, to say the least.

I applaud our business community.....Cincinnati Bell, for example, that is taking an everyday interest in Taft High School.....giving those youngsters a chance to learn technology...and a chance at a job upon graduation.

Procter and Gamble, and particularly the work of John Pepper. John understands the value of a meaningful relationship in a young persons life, and his leadership, and the volunteer efforts of thousands of Cincinnatians, has meant a huge difference in the lives of young people who now have a mentor to help them with the struggles in their education, and in their lives. We need more mentors....it makes a real difference.

(SUMMER)

I ask your help, and that of the community in very important project that is now underway...

Education must be year round....And this year we recognize that fact by embarking on an new, expanded, and more focused SUMMER EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

The outpouring of effort around this project is truly phenomenal...and I ask for your help. You can help with one...or two jobs....again...not as a babysitter, but real work imparting real skills with measurable results.

(2) JOBS AND DEVELOPMENT...We will fight for every job with a new, customer friendly approach to business', big and small.

We will treat every development plan as if it were the only one on the table...we will respond promptly and courteously to developers. We will institute a one-stop process where you can get all your permits, understand what is needed, and have a professional assigned to your case whose job it will be.... not just to throw a packet of information at you... but assist you throughout the development process.

We have already moved dramatically in that direction. Last month, City Council cut the bureaucracy, instituted a customer friendly process for small business, and said very clearly that, if the City cannot provide a service effectively... WE ARE NOT AFRAID, AND WE WILL, LOOK TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO PERFORM SERVICES TRADITIONALLY DONE BY GOVERNMENT.

Our employees got the message, and, I think, most relish the challenge to demonstrate that they can do what the private sector must do every day...be accountable and get results.

I told you that I would give you some objective ways to measure our success, and now I announce one that is daunting in it's scope...call it...The Vine Street Project.

In the past year I have spent hours on Vine Street between Central parkway and Calhoun....and it is a street too often filled with crime, litter, abandoned buildings and cars, and.... human beings without hope.

Today, we begin the long process to change that with a critical test of whether city government and the private sector can partner to make a change of seismic proportions on Vine Street. It is, indeed, a test of whether our new government, our new attitude, can produce results.

Why Vine Street?

The answer is simple: It is the primary connector between our two biggest job centers...the downtown and the University and medical center. The University of Cincinnati has undertaken a massive effort to improve the neighborhoods that surround it, and we are their partner in the revitalization of neighborhoods. Improvements on Vine will effect safety, housing, and jobs throughout the area.

WHAT IS THE VINE STREET PROJECT?It is a focused effort to bring all City services to bear in one location to improve living conditions, business and job opportunities, give hope to residents and small business, be a signal that Over the Rhine is a neighborhood for all, not just people at the lowest income level.

The Vine Street Project: (1) Crime

(2) Abandoned Buildings

(3) Junked Cars and Vacant Lots

(4) Litter and Street Cleanliness

(5) Small Business

We will create The Pride Center on Vine from which all of this will be coordinated, and the people on Vine will be invited to participate in and help the change that will take place.

Someone is bound to say: you are throwing out the poor... take a look at Vine Street....we are not offering the poor on Vine any reason to hope their life ...and I WILL NO LONGER STAND BY AND NEGLECT THE PEOPLE OF VINE, AND THE PEOPLE OF OVER-THE -RHINE BECAUSE I FEAR THE POLITICS OF POVERTY, WHICH HAS NOT HELPED MAKE OVER-THE-RHINE the kind of community the residents and business' deserve.

(((Other Areas)))

Housing, Housing Court....

Banks...just do it....regionalism....

Convention Center.....

My goal this year is for every neighborhood to feel the effects of our customer friendly way of doing things...to have safer streets, cleaner streets...for new small business' to feel welcome in our City.

I am grateful to the people of Cincinnati for giving me the opportunity to serve. I know that, in electing me, they were not saying they liked the status quo...just the opposite.

They want to be proud of their City again...they want the negativity to stop...they want to move forward.

I'll say it again...Cincinnati is a great City...and we will serve her best by recognizing that, as public servants, our time here is limited.....and to be guided by the words of Theodore Roosevelt, who said in a speech to the New York Assembly in 1884;

“ I would rather go out of politics feeling that I had done what is right, than to stay in with the approval of all men, KNOWING IN MY HEART THAT I HAD ACTED AS I OUGHT NOT TO.”

You are kind to have me, and thank you.